

43rd ASSEMBLY DISTRICT • ASSEMBLY DEMOCRATIC CAUCUS CHAIR

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Jorgensen's Journal: The Lost Art of Listening

Between Twitter, Facebook, cell phones, land lines, email, and postal mail, modern society offers us countless ways to connect.

Still, I find that a good old-fashioned, face-to-face sit-down is the best way to convey your thoughts and be heard.

That's why, as your state legislator, I hold so many listening sessions – well over 500 - in the districts I've served. I've held them in senior centers, grocery stores, diners, libraries, town halls, gas stations – and even on a city bus.

Last week alone, I hosted 21 listening sessions about the proposed state budget, with one held in each and every community I serve.

One of my colleagues heard about my schedule and told me, bluntly, "You're nuts." He meant it in jest, but the comment highlights the fact that listening has become a lost art in today's society – and in today's Legislature.

That's sad. There's so much to be learned, when you open your ears.

What I learned is that, on the whole, folks are opposed to the Governor's budget proposal – and I want to share some of their thoughts with you.

Parents are worried about the quality of their kids' education. They know that our K-12 schools, already hobbling from referendum to referendum, can't take another \$150 per pupil cut in state funding, as Governor Walker proposes. They question support for the statewide expansion of the unaccountable private voucher school network.

Students came to my listening sessions, concerned about the future of the UW System. They know \$300 million in cuts will force layoffs, threaten programs, and diminish the educational experience. Some noted that the Governor's budget fails to fully fund the Wisconsin GI Bill, a move that could leave veterans in the lurch as they restart their lives and careers.

Seniors – and the folks who love and care for them – spoke up in defense of SeniorCare, and signed their names to my petition, in the hopes that Republican leaders will reverse the



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Governor's plan to shift people on to Medicare Part D, increasing out-of-pocket costs and creating confusion.

Folks in wheelchairs, folks who made special effort to attend a listening session, shared intensely personal stories in opposition to the dramatic changes the Governor's proposing to Wisconsin's innovative long-term care programs. Programs like IRIS and FamilyCare help people with disabilities manage their own care, and in many cases, live productive and independent lives – but are on the budget chopping block.

Town and village officials are sounding the alarm; once again, local control is under attack. The Governor would eliminate local assessments for property, creating a county-based system that it seems like no one wants. While little will be done to address their road funding concerns, Governor Walker is still putting \$1.3 billion in transportation spending on the state credit card.

This past week, I heard – really heard - the concerns of my neighbors. And, that input will help me be the best representative I can be. Because I understand their values, I can be a strong voice for them.

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